

**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT**

**September 4, 2003  
MEETING NO. 10-2003**

<b>APPLICATION:</b>	HDC2003-00259 HDC2003-00260
<b>DATE FILED:</b>	September 3, 2003
<b>APPLICANT/ OWNER:</b>	Aaron Fein 200 W. Jefferson Street Rockville, MD 20850



**PROPERTY DESCRIPTION**

The subject property is a single-family residence that faces east at the intersection of W. Jefferson and S. Van Buren Streets. It is located at the end of a row of contemporary late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century homes. The single-family house had been divided in to four rental apartment units, but is now in the possession of a single family.

**PREVIOUS ACTIONS AT THIS ADDRESS**

HDC2001-00205	Tree removals
HDC2002-00217	Remove gutters and install French drains (The HDC commented that replacing the gutters may be wiser than removing them and the applicant said he would investigate replacing them. The HDC determined that replacing the gutters and/or installing French drains did not require a Certificate of Approval and did not vote.)

**REQUEST**

The applicants have requested in separate applications to install roof ridge vents (HDC2003-00259) and soffit vents (HDC2003-00260). The two requests for Certificates of Approval will both be covered by this report; however, individual approval is necessary for each application.

## STAFF COMMENTS

- 1. Historic, archeological, or architectural value and significance of the site or structure and its relationship to the historic, archeological, or architectural significance of the surrounding area.*

The building at 200 W. Jefferson Street was constructed for Sophia Barnard Higgins. Mrs. Higgins had lived at 101 N. Adams with her husband John until his death in 1870. She then moved to Great Falls Road and finally had this large house constructed in 1892. Mrs. Higgins was considered outside mainstream Rockville society for her strong anti-slavery views and for running the family's general merchandise business after the death of her husband. Her house was also out of the ordinary. The interior was constructed with adaptations on the first floor to accommodate her handicapped daughter.

The house was drastically altered by previous owners from its appearance during the Higgins' occupation both inside and out. It was converted into apartments, altering the interior configuration and was re-clad in all-modern materials on the exterior. The aluminum siding and trim, vinyl windows, the removed front porch, and enclosed rear porch have all diminished the historic integrity of the house. However, the form and massing are fairly intact, visually identifying this house as one built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

- 2. The relationship of the exterior architectural features of the structure to the remainder of the entire structure and to the surrounding area.*

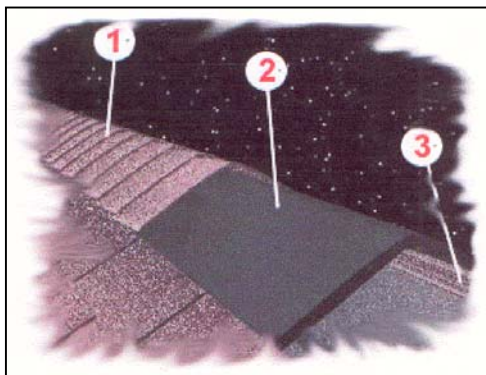
The house at 200 W. Jefferson has undergone numerous interior and exterior changes to replace building materials and to accommodate its current use as a four-unit apartment building. The soffits currently in place are not original to the house. They are aluminum like the rest of the exterior siding and trim. Nor is the composition shingle roof material original or historic in appearance. The roof form is intact, however, and is important in conveying a sense of history for this property.



*Locations of vent installations - red lines indicated ridge vents; blue lines indicate soffit vents*

3. *The general compatibility of exterior design, scale, proportion, arrangement, texture, and materials proposed to be used.*

The product specifications for the roof ridge vents, including material, dimensions and installation techniques, are unknown. The Feins were unable to provide information other than what was submitted with their application, which indicates the vent is a porous material placed along the ridge to be covered with the same light-colored composition shingle as the current roof. Staff is familiar with such products as Trimline Shingle-Over Ridge Vents and Cor-A-Vent products, which are available for installation in this fashion.



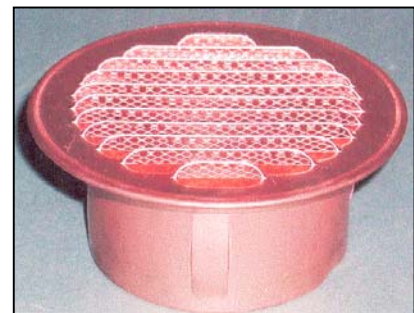
*Applicant's proposed ridge vent panel with shingle-over installation*

The soffit vents are round with a 3" diameter. They will be spaced every 2' under the soffits on the north and south façades at the east end, and along the entire west (rear) façade. They will not be installed on the primary (east) façade. They appear from a photograph to be metal, to be painted to match the soffit.

Because neither the composition shingle roof nor the aluminum soffits are original, no visible historic materials will be affected by the proposed installation of ridge and soffits vents. The soffit vents will have a minimal effect on the appearance of

the house, as they will be difficult to see from anywhere other than directly under the soffits and will not be placed on the primary façade of the house. In addition, they will be painted white to match the soffit, making their presence even more indistinguishable.

The potential for the ridge vents to substantially alter the appearance of the ridgeline is unknown. Any installation of this type will necessarily cut through the existing roof to create the vent and will raise the ridgeline somewhat to accommodate the vent panel. It is important, however, to retain the original form to the maximum extent possible. As stated in the City's *Architectural Guidelines*, roof forms "add appreciably to the essential character and silhouette" of buildings in historic districts. The Guidelines go on to state that "the appropriateness of roof forms must be considered in the context of the existing roof forms on the original buildings for purposes of remodeling."



*Proposed soffit vent*

Because the dimensions and installation methods are unknown for HDC2003-00259, staff is unable to determine the degree to which the existing roof form will be visually affected. Products with a low profile (as low as 5/8") are available and are recommended for their decreased visibility. Products which alter the ridge by rounding asphalt shingles over the vent, rather than replicating a true angled peak, are not appropriate as they will lend a decidedly

modern appearance. It is important that the selected vent system retain the current angle of the ridgeline.

The application does not specify where the ridge vents will begin and end, but staff would recommend extending the vents to the edges of the roof to continue the elevated plane of the ridge rather than breaking it up visually with altered heights.

*4. To any other factors, including aesthetic factors, which the Commission deems to be pertinent.*

The proposed soffit vents and a roof ridge vents will improve air circulation within the attic and, if installed properly, should prolong the life of the roof materials and structure. The applicant hopes to install the soffit and roof ridge vents at same time as the gutters are replaced (in kind) to coordinate the labor.

The applicant may be eligible for County property tax credits as well as State and Federal income tax credits for the ridge and soffit vents as well as the gutter replacement. Staff is available to assist the applicants in applying for tax credits.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

It is the opinion of the HDC staff that the addition of soffit vents will not impair the ability of this house to convey a sense of history and historic architecture, which has already been somewhat compromised through the use of unsympathetic exterior materials. While the ridge vents will raise the ridgeline, the installation can be handled in a manner that minimally affects the appearance of the roof. Overall, staff supports the addition of elements which are beneficial to the life of the roof.

Staff recommends the approval of HDC2003-0260 to install 3" round soffit vents every 2' on the soffits in the locations shown in the application.

Staff recommends the approval of HDC2003-0259 for the installation of roof ridge vents with the following provisions:

- The applicant selects the lowest profile membrane available
- The asphalt shingles covering the vents maintain the angle of the original roof and are not rounded over the ridgeline
- The asphalt shingles covering the vents are identical to those currently on the roof
- The ridge vents continue to the outside edges of the roof in order to maintain a continuous visual plane.